

NEWS RELEASE

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Student Ambassadors Experience the Democratic Process First Hand

The Echo Foundation Footsteps Global Initiative Sends Students to the Republican and Democratic Conventions

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (July 23, 2012) – The Echo Foundation is bringing together competitively chosen high school students from around Charlotte to explore civic engagement and the intricacies of American politics through *Footsteps Global Initiative: Youth Engage!* In collaboration with local civic nonprofit GenerationNation, this year’s initiative harnesses the excitement of the 2012 presidential campaigns and election by offering student participants a front row seat at the Republican National Convention, August 26-28, in Tampa, and the Democratic National Convention, September 4-6, here in Charlotte.

Twenty-seven Charlotte-area students applied to the program, with eight chosen to be Echo Student Ambassadors: Mijal Bucay and Arjun Suman Gupta, seniors at Providence High School, Brenden Carol, senior at South Mecklenburg High School, Desirae Kindley, junior at East Mecklenburg High School, Yeonsoo Sara Lee, senior at Myers Park High School, Gwendolyn Renee Smith, junior at North Mecklenburg High School, Damian Jarrell Walker, junior at Harding University High School, and Sarah Hollingsworth Whitmore, senior at Charlotte Latin School.

As part of the application process, each student was asked to submit an essay on the democratic process and design a learning experience focused on the chosen essay topic. Students also addressed how they would use The Echo Foundation’s curriculum guide *Democracy, Responsibility & Civic Engagement* and GenerationNation’s curriculum to maximize the engagement of fellow students.

“It’s truly inspirational to read these student proposals,” said Stephanie Ansaldo, President of The Echo Foundation. “Their insights on the political and economic state of our country and the

challenges we face are sophisticated, commanding and captivating. This group of young adults demonstrates an extraordinary capability and drive to better our society.”

Below are a few essay excerpts from Echo Student Ambassadors:

- “By lobbying, creating peaceful protests and campaign awareness, change can be inspired by all ages.”
- “As Americans we should feel obligated to help those who are being treated unjustly and inhumanely because not so long ago, we witnessed and felt the unjust and inhumane treatment of our very own people during the Jim Crow era.”
- “Essentially, if we allow the education system on the country’s youth to decline, it would be equivalent to imposing a permanent recession of the economy. The knowledge, skills and mindset that a classroom cultivates today will have a direct impact on the national economic outlook tomorrow.”

This year’s Footsteps Global Initiative is a part of The Echo Foundation’s 2012 election year series titled, “We the People. The Voices and Vision of Democracy.” Previous Footsteps programs have taken students to schools in Lexington, N.C. to create classroom libraries, a clinic and primary school in Rwanda, and to Europe to trace the life path of Nobel Peace Laureate and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel.

About “We The People. The Voices and Vision of Democracy.”

A three-part series that builds on past Echo successes, “We the People. The Voices and Vision of Democracy.” includes the *15th Annual Echo Award Event*, a *Photojournalism Project* and the *Footsteps Global Initiative: Youth Engage!*. This series will bring together political and business leaders from across the country in celebration of renowned humanitarians whose work responds to the question, “What can one person do?” With events and programs designed to engage the leaders of tomorrow, Echo leverages this historic opportunity presented by the DNC to teach and celebrate the best that America stands for: freedom, opportunity and self-determination.

About The Echo Foundation

The Echo Foundation was founded in 1997 to carry on the message Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel brought to Charlotte that year – a call to action for human dignity, justice and moral courage. Through comprehensive education programs, Echo equips individuals with moral and

intellectual tools necessary to create positive change in their local and global communities. The Echo mission, "...to promote justice and inspire hope through education, creative acts of service, and the development of leadership for a more humane world" is realized through five core initiatives: *Voices Against Indifference*, *Footsteps Global Initiative*, *Books Beyond Borders*, *Forum for Hope*, and *Living Together in the 21st Century*. The Echo Foundation has hosted 24 humanitarians and world leaders and served over 730,000 students in the US, Eastern Europe and East Africa. For more information, please visit www.echofoundation.org, www.echofoundationphoto.org or www.inthefootstepsofeliewiesel.org.

Quotes from Students Ambassadors

"To solve the challenge of helping long-term unemployed workers, government officials should look into reforming the U.S. education system since it is evident that it is not fulfilling its duties in supplying students with the right skills to remain gainfully employed when economic circumstances change."

– Mijal Bucay, Providence High School

"The broad focus on test results rather than analytical skills cripples our ability to compete in the high-tech world we live in. America's progress – and America's future – can be measured by our education system: our educational goals as a nation and the way we seek to achieve them."

– Brenden Carol, South Mecklenburg High School

"Essentially, if we allow the education system of the country's youth to decline, it would be equivalent to imposing a permanent recession on the economy. The knowledge, skills, and mindset that a classroom cultivates today will have a direct impact on the national economic outlook tomorrow."

– Arjun Gupta, Providence High School

"By lobbying, creating peaceful protests and campaign awareness, change can be inspired by all ages."

– Desirae Kindley, East Mecklenburg High School

“Researching the benefits and consequences of democratic interventions has shown me that the United States must balance priorities of national interest with ethical codes, as well as taking into account economic profits and losses, and political tensions.”

– Yeonsoo Sara Lee, Myers Park High School

“Becoming educated on any topic, allows the development of opinions and, in turn, learning about politics in school increases the chance of interest and concern about politics.”

– Gwendolyn Renee Smith, North Mecklenburg High School

“As Americans we should feel obligated to help those who are being treated unjustly and inhumanely because not so long ago, we witnessed and felt the unjust and inhumane treatment of our very own people during the Jim Crow era.”

– Damian Walker, Harding University High School

“No matter what party one belongs to, the search for alternate energy sources and urgent focus on scientific exploration or the retardation of global warming is in everyone’s best interest.”

– Sarah Whitmore, Charlotte Latin School

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